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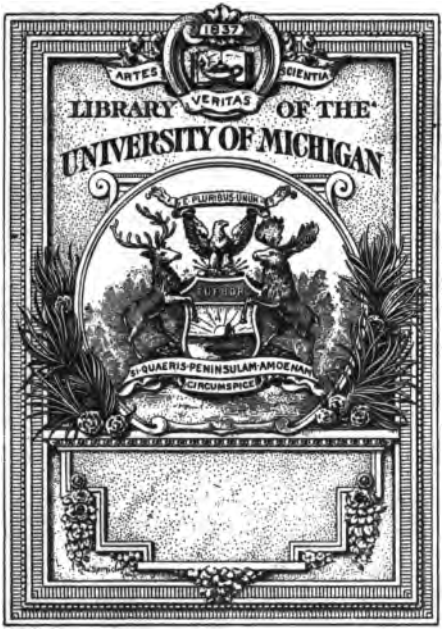

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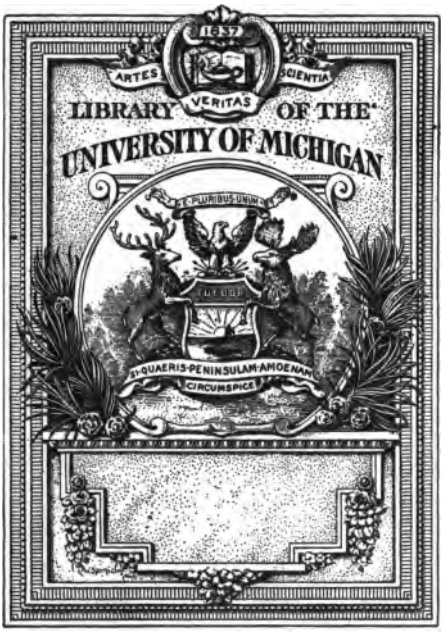

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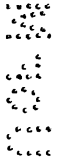

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power."

ELEGY

WRITTEN IN

A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD.

By THOMAS GRAY.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

By BIRKET FOSTER, W. L. SHEPPARD, W. L. TAYLOR,
FRANCIS MILLER, AND OTHERS.

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"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

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Gray's Elegy.

THE Curfew tolls the knell of parting day;
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea;
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds:

Save that, from yonder ivy-mantled tower,
The moping Owl does to the Moon complain
Of such as, wandering near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care;
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees, the envied kiss to share.

"For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care."

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield;
  Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;
How jocund did they drive their team a-field!
  How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
  Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile,
  The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth, e'er gave,
Await alike th' inevitable hour; —
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye proud! impute to these the fault,
If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise;
Where, through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault,
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

Can storied urn, or animated bust,
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honor's voice provoke the silent dust?
Or Flattery soothe the dull, cold ear of Death?

Perhaps, in this neglected spot, is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre.

But Knowledge, to their eyes, her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of Time, did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repress'd their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem, of purest ray serene,
The dark, unfathom'd caves of ocean bear;
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

"Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast,
The little tyrant of his fields withstood."

Some village Hampden, that, with dauntless breast,
The little tyrant of his fields withstood, —
Some mute, inglorious Milton, — here may rest;
Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood.

Th' applause of listening senates to command;
The threats of pain and ruin to despise;

To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their history in a nation's eyes, —

Their lot forbade: nor circumscrib'd alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd;
Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind;

The struggling pangs of conscious Truth to hide;
To quench the blushes of ingenuous Shame;
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride,
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool, sequester'd vale of life,
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

Yet e'en these bones from insult to protect,
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

"Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife."

Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd Muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply;
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

For who, to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing, anxious being e'er resign'd;
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind?

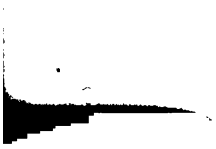
On some fond breast the parting soul relies;
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries;
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.

For thee, who, mindful of th' unhonor'd dead,
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
If, 'chance, by lonely Contemplation led,
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate;

Haply, some hoary-headed swain may say:
"Oft have we seen him, at the peep of dawn,
Brushing, with hasty steps, the dews away,
To meet the Sun upon the upland lawn.

"There, at the foot of yonder nodding beech,
That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,
His listless length, at noontide, would he stretch,
And pore upon the brook that babbles by.

"Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,
Muttering his wayward fancies, he would rove;
Now drooping, woeful, wan, like one forlorn,
Or craz'd with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.



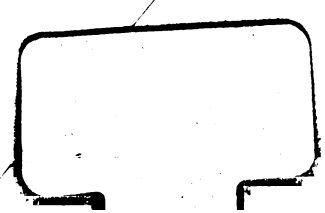
"One morn I miss'd him on the 'custom'd hill,
Along the heath, and near his favorite tree;
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood, was he;

"The next, with dirges due, in sad array,
Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne.
Approach and read — for thou canst read — the lay
Grav'd on the stone beneath yon aged thorn."

THE EPITAPH.

Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth,
A youth, to Fortune and to Fame unknown;
Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,
And Melancholy mark'd him for her own.

Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere;
Heaven did a recompense as largely send:
He gave to Misery all he had — a tear;
He gain'd from Heaven — 't was all he wish'd — a friend.

No further seek his merits to disclose,
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode;
There they alike in trembling hope repose, —
The bosom of his Father and his God.

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